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## KOTTAPATNAM: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE FROM LOWER SWARNAMUKHI RIVER VALLEY, ANDHRA PRADESH – A REAPPRAISAL

Venu Puvvadi

History Faculty

Vowel Junior College & Vowel IAS Academy

Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, India

### Introduction

The Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014, No. 6 of 2014 (1<sup>st</sup> March, 2014)<sup>i</sup>. An Act to provide for the reorganization of the existing State of Andhra Pradesh and for matters connected the state was divided or bi-purification into two states i.e. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana on 2 June 2014. This peninsular plateau slopes from west to east and it consists of several large and small plateaus developed on granitic gneiss, with undulating surfaces having broad, rounded summits - some of which have an elevation of over 600 m. The larger segment towards the south, known as the Deccan plateau, incorporates the Satpura ranges, the Western and Eastern Ghats, and several plateaus. The Deccan plateau is tilted to the east and is drained by the river systems of the Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna, Penneru, Swarnamukhi and Kalangi, which flow into the Bay of Bengal.

Andhra Pradesh, blessed with vast natural resources – high mountain ranges, perennial and semi-perennial rivers, dense forests, a wide variety of flora and fauna provided a congenial habitat for man since prehistoric times. The southern coastal Andhra between the Gundlakamma River and the Swarnamukhi river up to the Kalangi rivers, in the early historic period and it was populated in the narrow plateau region 15-30 km. off the coast and in the upland regions the settlements primarily concentrated on the rivulets. Important settlements were located on the coastal route connecting the Krishna valley and the Kanchipuram region. Amongst them, Kottapatnam is an important early historic site in this region.

### The study area

Kottapatnam site (14.139698 Latitude and 80.109357 Longitude), now a small village in the Kota tehsil of Nellore district in the Swarnamukhi river area and just about 500 Mts. away from the sea coast of Bay of Bengal, must have been an active port of call for the vessels coming from both western and eastern countries.

In the recent past, Kottapatnam in the Nellore district just beside the Swarnamukhi river basin was excavated and some information about the results of these excavations is available for us. The directorate of Archaeology and museums, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh was reported the discovery of Kottapatnam<sup>ii</sup> site, which is located in the district of Nellore was reported with the importance of early historical period.

### Kottapatnam in Ancient Literature

Thus, from the above discussion it is evident that Kottapatnam was an important port of call for the ships coming from Eastern as well as Western far off lands. Probably this place finds mention in ancient literature. Ptolemy mentions Kottis amongst the places on the eastern coast.<sup>iii</sup> Kottis has earlier been identified with Alluru Kottapatnam in Prakasm district.<sup>iv</sup> But, now, in view of the recent discovery, this identification may have to be reconsidered. In all probability, Kottapatnam under discussion, is the place mentioned by Ptolemy.

### Antiquity and administrative history of lower swarnamukhi

The lower swarnamukhi area which is falling under the Nellore region and was called as Munda Nadu and Munda rastra and from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., the name Pakanadu came into usage revealing the political and administrative changes that came with the emergence of Telugu Chodas.<sup>v</sup> While it is now recognized that Tondainadu northern most parts more or less doesn't extend beyond the Ami and the Swarna Mukhi rivers, the Munda rastra or Munda nadu forms the heartland of the Nellore region.<sup>vi</sup> Known from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. the Munda nadu comprises of the present day taluks of Nellore and Venkatagiri taluks of Nellore district.<sup>vii</sup> The Pakanadu, the larger region corresponds to the coastal tracts between the river Gundlakamma in the north, the Lake Pulicat and the rivers Swarnamukhi and Pralayakaveri in the South and on the west by the Veligonda ranges of the Eastern ghats extending up to the Cuddapah and Rajampet taluks of the Cuddapah district. The Nellore region was under the rule of the Satavahanas, Pallavas, Eastern Chalukyas, Chalukya Cholas, Telugu Cholas, and Kakatiyas during the period.



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## Subsistence Pattern

Here, traces of ancient habitation could be noticed for a stretch of more than one kilometer. Throughout this area profuse quantities of foreign potteries were noticed. Probably, no other site in South India has yielded so much foreign ware as noticed at Kottapatnam. Numerous shreds, both of Roman and Chinese origin could be picked up from the surface itself. Apart from this, the other important evidence is the artificial channel which was dug probably for berthing of the ships.

## The Port

The site with cultural debris is just about 500 Mts. away from the sea coast. Though the foreign wares indicate that this place was receiving vessels from far off lands, there is no river or rivulet joining the sea at this place, which would have facilitated inland berthing for the ships coming here. There is only an irregular creek which must have been used initially for berthing the vessels. But, probably, with a view to catering to the increased number of vessels coming here, an artificial channel was dug, which extends to about 1.25 km. in length and about 200 mts. in width. The occurrence of foreign wares all along the eastern bank of this channel is an indication that the cargo was loaded and unloaded along this channel.

## Roman Contact

Contact with Mediterranean region is indicated at this place by the occurrence of Roman Rouletted ware and Roman glass pieces. These finds show similarity with the finds from Arikamedu. Wheeler assigned middle of first century B.C. to second century A.D. for the Roman finds at Arikamedu.<sup>viii</sup> Depending on the material similarity, the Roman Rouletted ware at Kotta-patnam also could be assigned the same chronology. At Kottapatnam, there is imported as well as locally produced variety of Rouletted ware. The imported ware is of very fine fabric with characteristic black to brown slip and produced metallic ring. Further the core is uniformly grey in colour. On the other hand, the locally produced ware is of coarse fabric with slip which peels off easily. The core is either reddish or blackish and sometimes even in dual color.

The extant evidence from different sites in South India indicate that the trade with Mediterranean region is more or less confined to the Satavahana period. Analysis of the Roman coin issues discovered at different places in India indicate that the Roman trade commenced during the rule of Augustus (29 B.C. - A.D. 14) and ceased almost entirely by Cara Calla (A.D. 211-217).<sup>ix</sup>

## Chinese Contact

More interesting and important is the evidence indicating South India's contacts with the Eastern countries, particularly China during pre-Christian era. Though we have literary references to contact with China in early days, so far there was no conclusive archaeological proof establishing the Chinese contact. A Chinese coin is reported from the ancient site of Chandravalli, but it is variously dated to 138 B.C., A.D. 502 and A.D. 886.<sup>x</sup> Thus this find does not come handy in proving early contacts with China. But, now with the discovery of numerous sherds of Stamped pottery ware, Kaoline pottery ware and glazed ware at Kottapatnam, contact with China is conclusively proved. Apart from this the site also has yielded a coin with squarish hole and Chinese script. This coin is yet to be dated.<sup>xi</sup>

Stamped pottery is a tradition in China at least since the first millennium B.C.<sup>xii</sup> The stamped pottery from Kottapatnam compares well with the published potter from Szechwan, a South China region.<sup>xiii</sup> Though stamped pottery is a tradition in India also, the stamping is usually confined only to the shoulder portion of the pots. On the other hand, the Chinese had a tradition of stamping the whole body of the pot, except neck and mouth. A full pot with stamped design all over the body was recovered from this site, clearly establishing that this pottery was imported. Apart from this none of the stamped designs have been found in any other site (except Arikamedu) in South India, though some cord impressed pottery kin to Chinese pottery is reported from several sites in Assam.<sup>xiv</sup> It is well known that North-Eastern India had contacts with China through land routes since pre-historic times.

## Conclusion

A very important ancient port with habitational vestiges was noticed at Kottapatnam. The discovery is very significant as the site goes back at least to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. and reveals foreign trade contacts in the form of Roman Rouletted Ware, Roman glass pieces, Chinese stamped, glazed and Kaolin pottery. The site is very extensive covering an area of about 1.5 km. by half a km and just 500 m away from the sea (Bay of Bengal). The significance of the site lies in the fact that here for the first time we have archaeological evidence showing South India's early contacts with China. The site has also yielded a broken stone Celt and a round stone ball (Bruce Foote's sling ball), both suggesting Neolithic vestiges.

The density of settlement and the presence of foreign goods at some of the sites in the area suggest that some of the locations were trading centers of the early historic times. From the retrospect the author may conclude that Kottapatnam was an important sea-



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port in ancient times and it received ships from the Mediterranean, as well as Chinese region. The discovery of this site proves conclusively, South India's contacts with China even during the pre-Christian era.

The archaeological sites and monuments in the Nellore district show great variety and uniqueness which calls for although study. Day by day the number of these monuments is dwindling and it is high time that the institutions engaged in archaeological work take up excavations and systematic study of these monuments before they completely disappear from the scene.

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